

It goes without saying that America is a nation with significant transportation needs that are driving our ever-expanding appetite for energy, and correspondingly, our over-reliance on petroleum products and foreign sources of oil.

With both traffic congestion and fossil fuel consumption on the rise, the challenge before policymakers is how to accommodate our nation's transportation and energy needs while taking the necessary steps to pursue a sustainable, energy independent future.

As we pursue a path towards energy independence and efficiency we must recognize that the solution requires a comprehensive approach. That is why I have introduced the PROGRESS Act - or Program for Energy Security - which offers a comprehensive package of measures representing a major national commitment to achieving energy independence for America.

The PROGRESS Act [H.R. 1300], which enjoys the support of 110 of my colleagues, is meant to initiate a robust national program on energy independence – akin to the Manhattan Project – that brings government, industry, and academic leaders to the table with the goal of making substantial gains in technology, conservation, and vehicle efficiency and to promote the use of public transit and the development of alternative energy sources.

This legislation complements other Democratic efforts on energy, such as Speaker Pelosi's Innovation Agenda and our Rural Working Group's Biofuels Package and has the support of leading House Democrats, including key committee chairmen such as John Dingell, Jim Oberstar, David Obey, Ike Skelton, and Bart Gordon

Among other provisions, the PROGRESS Act would create a bipartisan National Energy Security Commission to develop consensus national goals on energy – which Congress must act upon under expedited rules. It would establish a New Manhattan Center for High Efficiency Vehicles, seeking to double the average vehicle efficiency and to diversify fuel types.

The PROGRESS Act would also create a National Biofuels Infrastructure Development Program, providing grants to encourage the private sector to invest in wholesale and retail biofuel pumps, tanks and related distribution equipment. To deliver biofuels to market and security an affordable and reliable energy supply, this legislation calls for a stimulus package to upgrade the “pipeline” for biofuels – the nation’s freight rail system – while also providing grants to promote conservation alternatives such as public transit and commuter rail. Allow me to be more specific on this last point: we must increasingly find ways to encourage Americans to park their automobiles and take advantage of public transportation, where possible and when feasible

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That’s why the PROGRESS Act adds a special, one-time \$2 billion stimulus grant for the expansion of public transit services through the existing urban grant program.

In addition, the bill includes an incentive for commuters to choose transit by boosting the current transit benefit to match the federal parking benefit exclusion, which is currently \$205. Furthermore, it supports the growth of commuter rail by including a process for resolving rail use agreements when access to rail lines becomes an impediment to establishing local commuter rail systems or routes.

And finally, on the issue of public transportation, the PROGRESS Act promotes the development of new and expanded intercity rail passenger service through the use of guaranteed loans and rail bonds to help state and local governments that want to expand rail service as an alternative to vehicle travel.

Public transit must play a central role if America is going to declare its energy independence. Increasingly, we are seeing more Americans relying on the public transportation options that help them to work, play and participate fully in the American experience.

Over the last decade, public transportation has grown faster than the rate of vehicle miles traveled on our nation's highways. Last year, 10.1 billion trips were taken across America on local public transportation – marking the first time in 49 years that rider-ship has topped the 10 billion mark. This important milestone is all the more reason to increase local and federal investment in public transportation and proves that public transit is a vital part of the solution in certain regions and can play a larger role in other areas if it received greater support in Washington.

The PROGRESS Act recognizes that increasing our nation's investment in public transportation is an important goal not only for transportation mobility, but also for our nation's ability to make significant strides towards reducing our dependence on foreign sources of oil and achieving true energy independence. I urge all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to review this proposal, to give us ideas to improve it, and then to work together for a Program for Real Energy Security.